

FROM THE BABYLON OF THE WEST

being present. Gregory knew no Italian and Catherine no Latin, the friar acting as their interpreter. In spite of the correspondence that had passed between them, the Pope had been prejudiced against her ; but he was unable, now that he saw her face to face, to withstand the magic of her personality. " In order that thou mayest see clearly," he said, " that I desire peace, I put the matter entirely into thy hands ; only be careful for the honour of the Church." He assigned to her what Stefano Maconi calls " a fine house with a beautifully decorated chapel," where, for the three months that she stayed in Avignon, he lodged and supported her whole household at his own expense.¹

But the Florentine ambassadors did not appear, and rumours reached the court—rumours greedily accepted and spread abroad by the prelates of the Curia—that new and oppressive taxes were being imposed upon the clergy at Florence. The three ambassadors —Pazzino Strozzi, Alessandro dell' Antella, and Michele Castellani—had been nominated in May, and their coming formally notified to the Pope. Their original commission had reference only to getting the ecclesiastical censures removed, but this had been extended, at the advice of Bernabo Visconti, to include the whole question of peace.² Nevertheless, the counsels of the Signoria were divided, and at least some of the Eight were unwilling to come to terms with the Church until the whole of her temporal power was completely destroyed. The matter lingered on in this way through all June. Catherine, who had understood that the ambassadors were to follow her immediately, with full powers to confer with her and arrange terms with the Pope through her, and that, in the meanwhile, all hostilities on the part of the Florentines would be suspended, was amazed and indignant. " Believe me, Catherine," said the Pope, " they have deceived and will deceive thee ; they will not send the ambassadors, or, if they do, it will be such a mission that it will amount to nothing." Already a fresh process was preparing

¹ *Legenda*, III. vi. 26 (§ 420) ; *Processits*, col. 1337 ; *Epistola Domni Stephani*, § n.

² Gherardi, *op. cit.*, docs. 221, 228.